United Nations

United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

Report of the fifty-fifth session (21-25 May 2007)

General Assembly
Official Records
Sixty-second session
Supplement No. 46 (A/62/46)

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Note

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1. Since the creation of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation by the General Assembly in its resolution 913 (X) of 3 December 1955, the mandate of the Committee has been to undertake broad reviews of the sources of ionizing radiation and its effects on human health and the environment.[1] Exposure to radiation has origins such as: medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; nuclear weapon production and testing; natural background radiation; nuclear electricity generation; accidents such as the one at Chernobyl in 1986; and occupations that entail increased exposure to human-made or naturally occurring sources of radiation. The Committee thoroughly reviews and evaluates global and regional exposures to such sources and the resulting radiation doses. It evaluates the evidence of radiation-induced health effects derived from exposed groups, including survivors of the atomic bombings in Japan. It also reviews advances in understanding of the biological mechanisms by which radiation-induced effects on health or on the environment can occur. Those assessments provide the scientific foundation used, inter alia, by the relevant agencies[2] of the United Nations system in formulating international basic safety standards for protection against ionizing radiation and for the safety of radiation sources and by the International Commission on Radiological Protection in developing its recommendations on radiation protection.

2. The Committee expects that its report for 2006, together with scientific annexes entitled "Epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer", "Epidemiological evaluation of cardiovascular disease and other non-cancer diseases following radiation exposure", "Non-targeted and delayed effects of exposure to ionizing radiation", "Effects of ionizing radiation on the immune system" and "Sources-to-effects assessment for radon in workplaces and homes", will be published in 2007. All published reports of the Committee over the past 50 years have been converted for issue on CD-ROM. The Committee now also considers that it will be able to submit to the General Assembly in 2008 a further major report with scientific annexes, assuming that States will make available the necessary expertise and information to complete the work. Insufficient resources

[1] The terms of reference of the Committee are set out in resolution 913 (X). The Committee was originally composed of the following Member States: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czechoslovakia (later succeeded by Slovakia), Egypt, France, India, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (later succeeded by the Russian Federation), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America. The membership of the Committee was subsequently enlarged by the Assembly in its resolution 3154 C (XXVIII) of 14 December 1973 to include the Federal Republic of Germany (later succeeded by Germany), Indonesia, Peru, Poland and the Sudan. By its resolution 41/62 B of 3 December 1986, the Assembly increased the membership of the Committee to a maximum of 21 members and invited China to become a member.

[2] The international basic safety standards for protection against ionizing radiation and for the safety of radiation sources are currently co-sponsored by the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Pan American Health Organization.

and a break in continuity in the secretariat of the Committee had seriously delayed the development and finalization of those undertakings.

3. The Committee held its fifty-fifth session in Vienna from 21 to 25 May 2007.[3] Peter Burns (Australia), Norman Gentner (Canada) and Wolfgang Weiss (Germany) served as Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, respectively. The Committee reviewed advance versions of documents on radiation exposures of the public and workers, accidental exposures to radiation, exposures resulting from medical uses of radiation, and effects of ionizing radiation on non-human biota, which it had considered at its fifty-fourth session, held in Vienna from 29 May to 2 June 2006, and had reported to the General Assembly in its report on that session.[4] The Committee at its fifty-fifth session also reviewed advance versions of documents on radiation health effects due to the Chernobyl accident and a summary report on the sources and effects of radiation exposure, which it had considered at its fifty-third session, held in Vienna from 26 to 30 September 2005. As previously reported,[5] the Committee had originally planned that those documents would be published by 2005.

4. The Committee noted that the General Assembly, in resolution 61/109 of 14 December 2006, had urged the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to review and strengthen the current funding of the Committee and to continue to seek out and consider alternative funding mechanisms to complement existing ones, so that the Committee could discharge the responsibilities and the mandate entrusted to it by the Assembly. The Committee noted that UNEP had, on an exceptional basis, made a financial contribution for the printing of the report of the Committee for 2006, including its scientific annexes, in the biennium 2006-2007. The Committee also noted that UNEP had established a general trust fund to receive and manage voluntary contributions from Member States, international organizations, financial institutions and other bodies to complement the existing appropriations from the regular budget of the United Nations.

5. It was noted that the restoration of an operating budget that would allow the Committee to fulfil its mandate from the General Assembly in a predictable manner, pursuant to Assembly resolutions 57/115 of 11 December 2002, 58/88 of 9 December 2003, 59/114 of 10 December 2004, 60/98 of 8 December 2005 and 61/109, remained a critical point. For the past several years, the Committee had expressed its deep concern that reliance on a single post at the Professional level in its secretariat had left the Committee seriously vulnerable and had hampered the efficient implementation of its approved programme of work. The Committee appealed to the Assembly to urge the Secretary-General to take appropriate administrative measures, such as the redeployment of an additional post at the

[3] The fifty-fifth session of the Committee was also attended by the official contact points of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine for Chernobyl matters and observers from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the European Commission, the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements, the International Organization for Standardization and the International Union of Radioecology.

[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 46* and corrigendum A/61/46 and Corr.1.

[5] Ibid., para. 2.

Professional level to the secretariat of the Committee, so that the secretariat could adequately service the subgroups of the Committee and effectively facilitate the use of the invaluable cost-free expertise offered to the Committee by its members. The Committee considered that the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 must be strengthened pursuant to Assembly resolutions 57/115, 58/88, 59/114, 60/98 and 61/109.

6. The Committee noted that the General Assembly, in its resolution 61/109, had reaffirmed its decision to maintain the present functions and independent role of the Committee; emphasized the need for the Committee to hold regular sessions on an annual basis; and requested the Committee to continue its work, including its important activities to increase knowledge of the levels, effects and risks of ionizing radiation from all sources. The Committee also noted that the Assembly, in resolution 61/109, had endorsed the intentions and plans of the Committee for completing its present programme of work of scientific review and assessment on behalf of the Assembly, and had requested the Committee to submit plans for its future programme of work to the Assembly at its sixty-second session. Moreover, the Committee considered that there was a need to develop a longer-term strategy that would include taking steps to streamline the future development of documents and to ensure their relevance and quality and their rapid dissemination.

7. To that end, the secretariat had requested input from relevant international organizations and the representatives of the States members of the Committee for its future programme of work. The Committee at its fifty-fifth session conducted preliminary discussions on the submissions received. It decided to develop for its fifty-sixth session a longer-term strategic plan, which would be result-based and which would establish objectives, expected achievements and associated performance indicators and would act as a planning tool for future programme budgets. The Committee requested the General Assembly to note that intention.

8. The Committee continued to recognize the importance of information from Member States and relevant international organizations. It called upon all Member States, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other international and national scientific bodies to continue to make available relevant and authorized information for its reviews, whose quality and completeness critically depended on such information.

9. The Committee noted that the General Assembly, in its resolution 61/109, had invited those Member States that desired to join the Committee to inform the President of the Assembly of their interest, and had decided to further consider the question of membership of the Committee in all its aspects, including financial implications, at the next session. The Committee noted that some 100 experts, including observers from international organizations, attended its annual sessions. The Committee considered that having a larger membership would add costs in terms of servicing the Committee and its sessions and would seriously hamper its ability to make effective and efficient decisions and build consensus on complex scientific issues. The Committee noted that scientists from some States that were not members of the Committee had, through bilateral arrangements, attended sessions of the Committee and contributed to its work as advisers to representatives of States that were members of the Committee. The Committee stressed that a solution should be found to the financial and resource issues before any discussion took place in the

Assembly in relation to the possibility of expanding the membership of the Committee.

10. The Committee emphasized that, in a spirit of effectively contributing to the work of the Committee, States members of the Committee needed to field active scientists as representatives, alternates and advisers, so that the Committee could fulfil its mandate as set out in General Assembly resolution 913 (X). In this regard, essential elements for the Committee were: sustainable knowledge on a broad range of issues in the field of radiation levels and effects; the capability to compile, prepare and evaluate scientific reports; competent assessment of draft scientific documents; and capability to summarize and synthesize the material for the Assembly, the scientific community and the public.

11. The Committee considered that it would require seven days for its fifty-sixth session to finalize its substantive report. It therefore decided to hold its fifty-sixth session in Vienna from 10 to 18 July 2008. The Committee requested the General Assembly to support that intention. To guide the Committee, new officers were elected to serve at its fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh sessions: Norman Gentner (Canada), Chairman; Wolfgang Weiss (Germany), Vice-Chairman; and Mohamed A. Gomaa (Egypt), Rapporteur.